

NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND THE RUSSIAN-U.S. DIALOGUE IN THE PRESENT -DAY RUSSIAN OFFICIAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract:

This paper provides an overview of the Russian official discourse with regards to nuclear weapons and the Russian-U.S. strategic dialogue over the last two and a half years, i.e. under the Presidency of Dmitry Medvedev. Discourse analysis is used on three key foreign policy documents. Statements of the key Russian officials are studied with equal attention paid to those meant for the international audience and those targeting the Russian public. Recurrent topics are identified, some of them being present in all messages and others reserved for the domestic or for the foreign audience only. I present preliminary conclusions on how the issues are framed for different audiences and why. Finally, I sketch the framework for further research.

Keywords: the Baltic States, European identity, European integration, identity approach, Ukraine.

Introduction

Negotiations aimed at concluding a new strategic arms reduction treaty to supersede the expired START-I were a "hot" topic in the Russian-U.S. relations in 2009 and early 2010. The joint statement issued on December 4, 2009 emphasized the two countries' "commitment, as a matter of principle, to continue to work together in the spirit of the START Treaty following its expiration" and to maintain strategic stability (U.S.-Russian Joint Statement, 4 December 2009). The new START was signed in Prague on April 8, 2010 and ratified by the U.S. Senate on December 22, 2010. In case of successful entry into force it will not only supersede START-I, but will also replace the Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions of May 24, 2002, also known as the Moscow Treaty, which otherwise will stay in force until December 31, 2012. The new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty will be in force for ten years and sets the following reduction ceilings: 700 deployed ballistic missiles and heavy bombers; 1.550 deployed warheads; 800 deployed and non-deployed launchers and heavy bombers. It is noteworthy that the Russian part was not satisfied with mentioning the link between offensive and defensive arms in the treaty preamble only. In

addition to that, a unilateral statement was made that the treaty “can function and be viable only if the United States of America refrains from developing its missile defense capabilities quantitatively or qualitatively” (Russian Statement on Missile Defense, 8 April 2010). Thus, Russia underlined that it would consider unfavorable – in its point of view – the scenario of U.S. missile defense development as “exceptional circumstances”, “jeopardizing its supreme interests” and serving as the basis for withdrawal in accordance with article XIV (START Treaty, 8 April 2010).

The progress achieved so far raises the question about further arsenal reductions and subsequent agreements to cover the issues of concern, such as tactical nuclear weapons, anti-ballistic missile defense or strategic non-nuclear weapons. However, for such agreements to be concluded, it is necessary to make sure that both parties speak the same language. Absence of the common understanding of strategic stability under present circumstances complicates achieving progress in bilateral discussion of the key security issues.

The most important official Russian documents, assigning definitions to key notions in the strategic domain, identifying threats and setting the course of action, are “National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020” (approved on 13 May 2009), Russian Military Doctrine (approved on 5 February 2010), and Russian Foreign Policy Concept (approved on 15 July 2008). All of them are relatively recent and provide useful insight on the current Russian view of strategic stability, role of nuclear weapons, dynamics of bilateral relations with the USA and key security threats. Thus, I use discourse analysis on these three documents, as well as on other statements of Russian officials, to capture and illustrate the Russian perspective on nuclear affairs in relation to the United States of America. The following sections deal with recent and relevant salient issues, as well as with historical legacies that have shaped the bilateral relations between the two states, permanently relating to the key strategic documents of Russian foreign policy.

Key documents

Presenting the new National Security Strategy to the Russian Security Council in March 2009, President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev emphasized Russia’s long-term objectives: building international relations “on the basis of equality and mutually beneficial cooperation of states”, “pursuing rational and pragmatic foreign policy”,

and avoiding “costly confrontation and new arms race” (Medvedev, 24 March 2009). Unilateral formation of the global missile defense system was listed among threats in the “National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020”, along with militarization of space and development of non-nuclear strategic weapon systems, as they provoke arms race and signal attempts of certain states to achieve military superiority. In the meantime, according to this document, Russia’s long-term sustainable development is conditioned by strategic stability and consistent progress towards nuclear weapon-free world. Moreover, on the path towards “nuclear zero” Russia will maintain strategic parity with the USA and will try to involve other nuclear-weapon states in the nuclear arsenal reduction process (National Security Strategy, 12 May 2009). The new version of the Russian Military Doctrine provides a similar list of threats, while emphasizing that nuclear arms remain an important factor in preventing nuclear and conventional military conflicts, therefore Russia will maintain its nuclear deterrence potential (Military Doctrine, 5 February 2010). As for the slightly older Russian Foreign Policy Concept, adopted in 2008, it notes that over the recent years “the danger of large-scale war, including nuclear, has been reduced”. In this document Russia also voices its appeal against unilateral ballistic missile defense initiatives, militarization of space and development of new types of weapons capable of provoking the arms race. It also confirms its readiness to carry out negotiations aimed at “reducing nuclear arsenals to the minimum level necessary for strategic stability” (Foreign Policy Concept, 15 July 2008).

These three major documents outline the main concerns and objectives of the Russian Federation relevant for the strategic dialogue with the United States. However, the study of the present-day Russian nuclear discourse should not be limited to them. A wider range of formats should be taken, in order to analyze what meaning is assigned by the Russian elite to the key notions in the Russian-U.S. strategic dialogue. Systematic study of how strategic stability, minimal deterrence and other related concepts are understood by Russian officials would facilitate laying the foundation for common Russian-U.S. understanding of those phenomena.

Research subject

So, how are nuclear issues framed? Clearly, it depends on the context. Nuclear weapons may be presented as an attribute of leadership position in world politics, a part of the Russian national legacy, a necessary component of deterrence, a key aspect of bilateral relations with the USA, a crucial

international problem, a prerequisite of Russian national security etc. Since public officials have the power of framing and agenda-setting, it is interesting to track what is presented to the general public and how it is presented. No doubt, those who set the agenda can select and present information in a certain way, in order to shape the public understanding of this or that political issue according to their design (Nelson et al. 1997, 223). Quite often no new information is presented; instead, framing affects the way a person perceives relevance of certain facts and alternative interpretations in case of controversial or complex issues (Nelson et al. 1997, 226). For instance, in one of the first paragraphs of President Medvedev's article "Forward, Russia!", nuclear weapons are referred to as part of the Russian heritage along with "colossal natural resources" and "impressive achievements in science, technology, education, and art" (Medvedev, 10 September 2009). And on April 14, 2010 at Brookings Institute Dmitry Medvedev stated: "As regards further reduction of nuclear offensive potentials... You can have no doubt, we are ready for that" (RIANovosti, 14 April 2010). Is there a contradiction between the two statements? Probably not, they just place an emphasis on different aspects of the same phenomenon.

When analyzing Russian official discourse with regards to strategic stability and nuclear weapons, it makes sense to focus on the key Russian officials who usually give public comments and statements on those matters, namely: President Dmitry Medvedev, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov, head of the International Affairs Committee of the Russian Federation Council Mikhail Margelov, head of the State Duma International Relations Committee Konstantin Kosachev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, head of the "United Russia" parliamentary faction Boris Gryzlov etc. Such a study of the current national nuclear discourse should cover the period starting from spring 2008, when Dmitry Medvedev was elected Russian President, and until present day, with a special emphasis on START talks.

There are several recurrent topics related to nuclear disarmament and Russian-U.S. bilateral relations that are raised by Russian officials in their statements and interviews. It is interesting to see how they are framed and how key points are highlighted in the messages targeting different audiences. This paper represents the author's first attempt to map out such an investigation. Therefore, I analyzed a limited set of documents and statements, drawing only preliminary conclusions. In this paper, I am

focusing on statements and messages of President Medvedev, Prime Minister Putin, Foreign Minister Lavrov and Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov. Those messages are all posted on the official websites of the Russian President, Prime Minister and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and were mostly delivered in Russian. No doubt, any officially released statement or interview can be translated to any language and thus become available to a wider group of people, but for the sake of this preliminary overview I will accept that interviews to the Russian media or statements made at meetings with the Russian officials or general public are primarily meant for the Russian population, while messages delivered at international events or in the overseas mass media target international audience in the first place.

Cold War references

One of the recurrent topics in the Russian official discourse is the need to overcome the Cold War legacy, or as Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov puts it, draw “a final line under the ideology and practice of the Cold War with its stake on «mutual assured destruction»” (Lavrov, 7 July 2010). At the 2008 Evian World Policy Conference, Dmitry Medvedev referred to “Sovietology” as a disease comparable to paranoia and typical for certain members of the U.S. Administration. He also underlined the need to abandon confrontational rhetoric, and stated that there would be no new edition of the Cold War and no new Fulton (Medvedev, 8 October 2008). One and a half years later, when asked by ABC News if the Cold War days were over, he said that he hoped so, as far as “the Cold War is a boring thing”, closely associated with tense life and wasted money (Medvedev, 12 April 2010). In-between those two statements he repeated on numerous occasions that during the Bush Administration the Russian-U.S. relations had worsened practically to the Cold War level (Medvedev, 10 July 2009; 18 September 2009; 23 November 2009).

Thus, even twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, every time there is a crisis in bilateral relations with the USA or a stumbling block in disarmament agenda, Russian officials recall the Cold War, and when the tension subsides, they frame it as breaking with the Cold War spirit. This message is more obvious in the statements meant for the foreign audience, but sometime targets the national one as well. For instance, talking to the Russian ambassadors and representatives accredited to international organizations in July 2008, Dmitry Medvedev stated that even though the world had gotten rid of the Cold War, “it is yet to find the new

equilibrium” (Medvedev, 15 July 2008). Two years later at a similar meeting, he expressed hope that “the remnants of the Cold War will become the thing of the past” and referred to Russia and the USA as two strong powers (Medvedev, 12 July 2010).

Sources of instability

Recalling the years of bipolar confrontation, Russian officials also frequently refer to U.S. unilateralism as the source of tension and instability. For instance, President Medvedev described Europe as a “common home”, where all important decisions should be made collectively without delegating them to “neighbors” or to a single “host” (Medvedev, 27 June 2008) and contrasted unilateral U.S. actions with joint efforts of the European states to monitor and counter common threats (Medvedev, 3 July 2008). Unipolarity and domination were declared unacceptable (Medvedev, 8 September 2008), and “unilateral strive for absolute security” was called a dangerous illusion (Medvedev, 31 March 2009). At the press conference in Pittsburgh, Medvedev went even further claiming that “the collapse of the unipolar world is taking place” and that the United States have finally realized that (Medvedev, 26 September 2009). Prime Minister Vladimir Putin echoed these words in his interview to “Le Monde” saying: “There can be no monopolism in world affairs. There can be no monostructure in the world. There can be no single master. And there can be no empires today” (Putin, 31 May 2008). It seems that both leaders are less vocal in condemning U.S. unilateralism when talking to the national public. On the other hand, when targeting the Russian audience, Russian officials often refer to potentially destabilizing factors that can be seen as stemming from unilateral policies of the previous U.S. Administration, namely: global ballistic missile defense, possible militarization of the Space and development of non-nuclear strategic weapon systems (Lavrov, 6 April 2010; Ryabkov, 11 April 2010).

Ballistic missile defense

It is widely known that the Russian leadership was disappointed with the development of the U.S. ballistic missile defense system in Europe. In August 2008, the Russian Foreign Ministry published its official reaction to the U.S. plan to deploy elements of strategic ballistic missile defense in Poland and Czech Republic. This plan was officially cited as a reason for worsening relations and presented as anti-Russian, aimed to change strategic balance and undermine stability and predictability in world affairs, leading to mistrust and provoking an arms race (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 August 2008). Meeting with the former U.S. State Secretary

Madeleine Albright in November 2008, President Medvedev referred to the planned U.S. missile defense elements as “unclear fragments that bring satisfaction to no one and only create problems” and emphasized that cooperation was more important than attempts to get unilateral benefits (Medvedev, 16 November 2008a). As a “part of the U.S. strategic infrastructure aimed at deterring Russian strategic nuclear forces”, ballistic missile defense had to be taken into account when assessing strategic equilibrium (Ryabkov, 26 December 2008). U.S. missile defense plans were also referred to as “annoying” (Medvedev, 1 March 2009), “harmful” and “meaningless” (Medvedev, 10 July 2009). In his September 2009 interview to the Swiss media, Dmitry Medvedev also hinted that only a certain group of U.S. politicians would have benefited from the U.S. missile defense system in Europe together with companies supplying missile and radars (Medvedev, 18 September 2009). In his interview to the Italian mass media in July 2009, President Medvedev recalled the link between offensive and defensive arms and labeled the position of the Bush Administration as “stubborn”, while one needed “self-restraint” and “ability to compromise” in order to settle the issue (Medvedev, 5 July 2009).

Ballistic missile defense may be the most problematic topic in the Russian-U.S. strategic dialogue, but it is by no means the only one. An intriguing document was published on the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on August 7, 2010, i.e. after the new START was signed and in the middle of allegedly improving relations: “Violation by the U.S. of its Obligations in the Sphere of Nonproliferation of WMD” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 August 2010). The list of violations comprises a wide range of issues: implementation of START-I, biological and chemical weapons, missiles, export control and conventional weapons, and specific instances are cited instead of vague allegations. It may serve to convey the following message: relations are improving under the Obama Administration, but that does not mean that Russia will depart from its foreign policy agenda or step back on issues of concern.

Action-reaction

At a press conference after G8 summit, President Medvedev stated that, in response to U.S. missile defense in Europe, Russia, instead of “throwing a fit”, would “contemplate counter-moves” (Medvedev, 9 July 2008). In the national media, anti-Russian connotations of U.S. ballistic defense were also pointed out. In his famous 2008 Address to the Russian Federal Assembly, President Medvedev listed the so-called recent “gifts” to Russia,

namely: construction of the global ballistic missile defense system, encirclement of Russia with military bases, and unconstrained NATO enlargement; he then compared these to “an endurance test”. He lamented the unwillingness of the USA to cooperate and enumerated measures in response to U.S. actions: reverse the decision to discontinue Kozelsk missile division, deploy the “Iskander” missile complex in Kaliningrad Region to neutralize the anti-missile defense system if necessary, and perform electronic jamming of the new objects of U.S. missile defense from the West of Russia (Medvedev, 5 November 2008). In his interview to “Le Figaro”, President Medvedev explained that the tough Russian measures described in his annual Address represented only an adequate response to U.S. actions. This response was conditioned by “serious foreign policy events and threats” and could be reversed, if the U.S. Administration reconsidered its decision (Medvedev, 13 November 2008). Also explaining the tough rhetoric used by president Medvedev, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov pointed out that this line ascended to the famous Munich speech of President Putin delivered in February 2007 and that the announced measures constituted nothing more than a response to U.S. missile defense initiatives. When the U.S. decision was reconsidered by the Obama Administration, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin stated at the press conference that the Russian reaction to reconsideration of U.S. decision was not “euphoric”, that it was “reserved and calm” and accompanied by “understanding and gratitude”. He also noted and any U.S. decisions would always be followed by adequate Russian response (Putin, 14 October 2009). Indeed, when asked about the “Iskander” missile complexes that were to be deployed in Kaliningrad Region, President Medvedev stated that as far as U.S. decision had been reversed, those missiles complexes would not be deployed (Medvedev, 26 September 2009).

Bilateral relations

In 2002 the United States withdrew from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), thus making the ABM system a hot issue on the Russian agenda and complicating bilateral relations. Talking to Henry Kissinger in late 2008, President Medvedev underlined that Russian-U.S. relations “have known better days” (Medvedev, 12 December 2008). During a press conference at the G8 summit in July 2009, he also emphasized that Russia was not to be blamed for this disappointing situation (Medvedev, 10 July 2009). In the joint press conference with Obama, Medvedev stated that the current level of Russian-U.S. relations did not correspond to “their potential”, “capabilities of our countries” and “requirements of the current epoch” (Medvedev, 6 July 2009). These are assessments of bilateral

dynamics under the Republican Administration. After the new President came to the White House, Russian official statements started to sound more optimistic about the future. According to President Medvedev, the change of the U.S. Administration offered a chance to open a new page in bilateral relations (Medvedev, 1 April 2009), closing a few difficult ones (Medvedev, 6 July 2009), and the new “reset” relationship should be one of true partnership (Medvedev, 16 November 2008a). According to Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, it should constitute an “honest dialogue based on principles and norms of the international law and taking into account interests of both Russia and the USA” (Putin, 27 January 2009), while Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov emphasized the need for “healthy pragmatism and realism” to overcome mistrust (Lavrov, 30 June 2009). Lavrov also used Cold War references talking about the shift from “mutual assured destruction” to “mutual assured stability” (Lavrov, 7 July 2010), while Dmitry Medvedev preferred a more innovative approach speaking of a new software, a new interface and a new gadget needed in Russian-U.S. relations to match the “reset” metaphor suggested by the Obama Administration (Medvedev, 20 October 2010). Another interesting metaphor was used when he referred to elements of the U.S. missile defense system in Eastern Europe, efforts to enlarge NATO and refusal to ratify the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe as “toxic assets” to get rid of (Medvedev, 31 March 2009). It seems that the most concise explanation of why Russia and the USA need to improve their bilateral relations was given by President Medvedev during the briefing after G8 summit, when he said that “there is no escaping from each other” (Medvedev, 8 July 2008).

These are some of the “international” statements. “National” ones also shifted from pessimism to cautious optimism. Russian-U.S. relations are “multilayer, complex and controversial”, according to Sergey Ryabkov (Ryabkov, 2 March 2009), and burdened with the “dead weight of stereotypes (Ryabkov, 28 May 2010). However, despite all difficulties and disagreements, it is acknowledged on the website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that “relations with the USA are one of Russian foreign policy priorities and a crucial factor in international stability” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 October 2010). In December 2008 in his traditional end-of-the-year interview to the three major Russian TV channels, President Medvedev was asked about the prospects of relations with the new U.S. Administration. He expressed hope for “more efficient and more reliable relations”, noting that certain opportunities had been lost and repeating

that it was not Russia who should be blamed for that (Medvedev, 24 December 2008). The same month, during the traditional "Conversation with Vladimir Putin" live on radio and TV, Prime Minister Putin was also asked about the prospects of the Russian-U.S. relations. He answered in a more reserved fashion, saying that there were positive signals, which would hopefully be transformed into practical policies (Putin, 4 December 2008).

An interesting assessment is given by Russian leaders personally to their new counterpart in their international statements and interviews. The new U.S. Administration headed by President Barack Obama is seen as friendly, constructive and open to dialogue. The Russian President expressed hope that it would be "more creative and more partnership-oriented" than the previous one (Medvedev, 1 March 2009). Comparing Obama to his predecessor George W. Bush, Medvedev pointed out that the former "can listen and understand better" (Medvedev, 10 July 2009). Moreover, he is actually "thinking when he is speaking" (Medvedev, 12 April 2010). President Medvedev also emphasizes that the new U.S. president does not try to mentor or offer ready-made solutions (Medvedev, 25 September 2009). It is noteworthy that both Dmitry Medvedev (Medvedev, 20 November 2010) and Vladimir Putin (Putin, 14 October 2009) referred to Obama's decision to reconsider U.S. missile defense plans in Eastern Europe as a "courageous" one.

START Treaty

The new START treaty is obviously the main practical achievement of the renewed nuclear disarmament dialogue. At the signing ceremony, President Medvedev presented it as a "reasonable compromise" and a "win-win situation" (The new Russian-U.S. START treaty was signed. 8 April 2010). It is constantly emphasized that it is, just as Russia wanted it to be, a legally binding agreement and not just a mere declaration (Medvedev, 8 October 2008). As for the link between offensive and defensive arms and the Russian statement on ballistic missile defense, President Medvedev explained in his interview to ABC News on April 12, 2010 that even in case of further U.S. ballistic missile defense development, the treaty would not automatically become invalid, but Russia may raise this issue in bilateral talks (Medvedev, 12 April 2010). The new START was equally often mentioned in the national media, along with the START-I - the first treaty to provide for deep reductions of the two countries' nuclear arsenals. When START-I expired, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a special statement where the role of this treaty in "ensuring international peace,

security and strategic stability” was noted. The treaty was referred to as the basis for the “new atmosphere of trust, openness and predictability” in disarmament, which helped to move from “co-existence” to “a mutually beneficial partnership based on equality and mutual trust” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4 December 2009). However, the old START is also seen as discriminatory in certain aspects (Lavrov, 6 April 2010). As for the new document, it may not be ideal, but according to Russian officials, it corresponds to Russian interests (Ryabkov, 11 April 2010). Before the signing of the new START, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov held a press conference. He reminded the audience that Russia offered to start working on a new treaty in Autumn 2005, but “U.S. partners were not ready for focused work based on quality and mutual consideration of interests”. When talks finally took place, they were based on the principle of equal and indivisible security.

As a result of interlinked compromises, the balance of interests was maintained. The link between offensive and defensive arms was set in a legally binding fashion. It is the first nuclear disarmament agreement negotiated in the absence of the ABM treaty and the first treaty which is truly equal “both in letter and in spirit” (Lavrov, 6 April 2010). Meeting with leaders of the four political parties represented in the State Duma (lower chamber of the Russian parliament) in January 2010, President Medvedev emphasized that one should avoid the unacceptable situation when the USSR had ratified a document, and the USA had not (Medvedev, 16 January 2010). He also specifically asked the “United Russia” MPs in both chambers of the Russian parliament to carefully consider the new START treaty and make sure its ratification would be synchronized with U.S. Senate ratification (Medvedev, 28 May 2010). According to Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov, the new START is “comparable to the best samples of diplomatic art of the previous years” (Ryabkov, 28 May 2010), and on December 24, 2010 summing up the results of the year live on TV, Dmitry Medvedev named the signing of the new START and its ratification by the U.S. Senate among the five major events of 2010, calling the new document “a cornerstone of European security” (Medvedev, 24 December 2010). However, during the traditional “Results of the Year” live interview on TV on December 24, 2009, Medvedev underlined that, nevertheless, Russia would still be developing its “strategic offensive forces” to defend the country and that the Russian “nuclear shield will always be efficient and sufficient for protection of Russian national interests” (Medvedev, 24 December 2009).

Nuclear deterrence

The role assigned to the Russian nuclear shield deserves special attention. The notion of nuclear deterrence inherited from the Cold War comes up in the Russian official discourse from time to time. For instance, in his interview to a Serbian newspaper, President Medvedev stated as the main premise that “nuclear arms cannot be used in practice”, although they had served to ensure strategic stability for years. He also noted that Russia was oriented at “maintaining the power balance with the USA” and was going to preserve its nuclear arsenal at the level “necessary to ensure national security of Russia and its allies” (Medvedev, 19 October 2009). At the press conference after the Russia-NATO Council summit, Medvedev noted that “during the previous decade the world developed on the basis of nuclear deterrence concept” and reiterated that “nuclear weapons helped preserve peace in Europe for several decades” (Medvedev, 20 November 2010). The deterrent role of the Russian nuclear forces is frequently mentioned in statements targeting the national public. Discussing military exercises “West-2009” (“Zapad-2009”), President Medvedev emphasized that those exercises had a defensive character and that this regional military force was a one of strategic deterrence, ensuring “strategic stability in the Eastern European region” (Medvedev, 28 September 2009a).

As for Vladimir Putin, he noted that new Russian “missile and space equipment is the main indispensable element in ensuring defense and security of the state, as well as an efficient means of nuclear deterrence” (Putin, 30 November 2009). Three days after the new START was signed, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov gave an interview to the “Voice of Russia” (“Golos Rossii”) radio, where he noted that nuclear arms had a “compensating role”, therefore lower nuclear ceiling would inevitably increase the role of conventional weapons in strategic equation (Ryabkov, 11 April 2010). In his interview to “Izvestiya” newspaper in May 2010, Medvedev stated that Russia “has to maintain its strategic capability”, as it served to protect Russian national interests and its role should neither be exaggerated nor underestimated (Medvedev, 7 May 2010). Instructing the newly appointed Commander-in-chief of the Russian strategic missile forces Sergey Karakaev in June 2010, Medvedev emphasized that the functioning of the Russian nuclear shield depended on him and that though nuclear arsenal was reduced, its combat component was left intact and Russian missile forces ought to be on full alert (Medvedev, 22 June 2010). Thus, when talking to compatriots, Russian officials emphasize unilateral deterrent role of the Russian nuclear arsenal and its importance

in ensuring Russian national security, while in the international context they tend to focus on the history of mutual deterrence.

International status

A Czech journalist asked Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov at the press conference after the new START had been signed: "Is Russia a world leader now"?, and he responded: "Russia has always been a world leader" (in Zygar', 11 April 2010). Leadership issue often comes up in the nuclear discourse, as far as nuclear weapons possession is associated with prestige. References to prestige and special international status are frequent in Russian official statements dealing with strategic dialogue and nuclear disarmament. In the joint press conference with President Obama in July 2009, President Medvedev stated that "such powerful states as the United States and Russia bear special responsibility for everything happening on our planet". Further on, he reiterated that "the resolution of numerous global problems depends on joint Russian-U.S. leadership" (Medvedev, 6 July 2009). Asked about "nuclear zero" by "Der Spiegel" in November 2009, he used stronger wording: "Who else, if not us? If we do not deal with this issue, there will be no disarmament at all" (Medvedev, 7 November 2009). In November 2009, after the meeting with President Obama, Dmitry Medvedev stated that international security was the "topic where the climate depends on positions of the Russian Federation and the United States", as far as even in the previous years international climate depended on how well the two countries listened to each other (Medvedev, 15 November 2009). At the summit in September 2009 he also underlined that "Russia had always been a reliable and predictable partner" in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation (Medvedev, 24 September 2009). In an interview to the BBC, Medvedev pointed out that Russia had certain responsibilities as "a large state, as a responsible member of the international club, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council" (Medvedev, 29 March 2009). In his "Washington Post" article, he added the USA to this equation, saying that Russia and USA bear a special responsibility and "have a lot to offer to the rest of the world", especially in the field of strategic stability and nuclear security (Medvedev, 31 March 2009).

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov took up this line, noting at the joint press conference with Hillary Clinton in May 2009 that "Russia and the USA, as the two largest nuclear powers, are ready to take the lead, set an example and involve other countries into collective cooperation" in the

field of nuclear disarmament (Lavrov, 7 May 2009). Russian leaders are equally, if not more vocal, when covering this topic for the national audience. Talking to Russian ambassadors and representatives accredited to international organizations in July 2008, President Medvedev referred to special responsibility of Russia for resolving regional and global problems. This was one of the rare occasions where President Medvedev actually used the term “strategic stability” when talking about Russian-U.S. relations (Medvedev, 15 July 2008). In November 2009, in his annual address to the Federal Assembly, President Medvedev mentioned nuclear energy and Russia being in the “elite club” of countries developing nuclear technology (Medvedev, 12 November 2009). Talking to the Russian military men in September 2009, Medvedev stated that armed forces contributed to “ensuring security and national interests of our country, as well as, hopefully, to increasing its international prestige” (Medvedev, 28 September 2009b). However, meeting with the dominant political party “United Russia” in May 2010, Medvedev emphasized that Russia can be considered a “highly developed state” in many aspects, not limited to missiles and nuclear weapons (Medvedev, 28 May 2010). So, nuclear forces are perceived as a crucial component of the Russian international status, but Russian officials hasten to add that they are not the only one.

Russian nuclear forces

Most recurrent topics figure both in national and international messages. However, some of them are reserved for the national audience only. In his 2010 Address to the Federal Assembly, Medvedev mentioned neither the USA nor the new START, but he talked about Russian military modernization, outlining five major tasks. Two of them are relevant for the present overview. Task 1 is to pay special attention to aerospace defense, uniting air defense, ballistic missile defense, space monitoring and missile attack warning under the single strategic command. Task 4 is to promote international cooperation in the field of security. President Medvedev described the alternatives as follows: “either we [Russia and Europe] reach an agreement with regards to missile defense and create a rigorous joint cooperation mechanism” or “there will be a new stage of the arms race” (Medvedev, 30 November 2010). Modernization is at the top of President Medvedev’s agenda, and military modernization is its integral part. In May 2008, delivering a speech at the State Duma one day before the Victory Day, Dmitry Medvedev talked about refurbishment of the Russian army and fleet with new combat equipment and about proper financial remuneration to those who ensured Russian national security, especially to those who served in the most important fields, namely: submarines, strategic

bombers, air defense and strategic missile forces that are key in Russian defense capacity (Verbatim record of the Russian State Duma session, 8 May 2008). Prime Minister Putin, reporting about activities of the Russian Government in 2008, also mentioned the need to raise allowance to those military men, who “make the biggest contribution to strengthening national security” working in “the most important and especially dangerous” divisions, including strategic missile forces (Putin, 6 April 2009). In October 2008 President Medvedev attended a missile launch at Plisetsk launch site (launch of the intercontinental ballistic missile “Topol”) and noted that new types of weapons would be made operational in addition to existing ones that are time-tested and demonstrate that Russian “shield” is functional (Medvedev, 12 October 2008). Meeting with the representatives of the Defense Ministry in March 2009, Medvedev named “attempts at enlarging the military infrastructure of the North Atlantic Alliance” in the proximity of Russian borders one of the threats requiring qualitative modernization of the Russian military. He also listed priority tasks, and the first among them was “qualitative increase” in combat readiness, primarily of strategic nuclear forces (Medvedev, 17 March 2009). At the regular meeting with representatives of political parties in the State Duma in April 2010, Medvedev updated Russian MPs on the new START, emphasizing that the new document allowed Russia “to improve all aspects of our strategic nuclear potential, remaining the self-sufficient leading nuclear power” (Medvedev, 2 April 2010). Observing the military exercises “East-2010” (“Vostok-2010”) on board of the atomic missile cruiser “Peter the Great” in July 2010, Medvedev stated that the cruiser itself “symbolized the power of our Armed forces and our Navy” (Medvedev, 4 July 2010). Meeting with Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov in January 2010, Medvedev asked him to focus on strategic nuclear component of the Russian military and on acquisition of high-tech military equipment (Medvedev, 14 January 2010).

Financial aspects of modernization

Military modernization with a focus on efficient nuclear arsenal may be an official policy, but it can be restrained by financial crisis. Meeting with the crew of SSBN “St. George the Victorious” (“Georgy Pobedonosets”) in September 2008 and with the crew of the missile cruiser “Varyag” in November 2009, Medvedev talked about modernization of the Russian military forces and assured his audience that everything would go as planned despite financial crisis (Medvedev, 25 September 2008; 16 November 2009b). Meeting with alumni of the Russian military academies,

universities and institutes in July 2009, he reiterated that modernization of the Russian military forces would go on, despite financial difficulties (Medvedev, 1 July 2009). Similar things were said during the launch of the nuclear submarine "Severodvinsk" in June 2010 (Medvedev, 15 June 2010). However, everything is not that simple. In June 2010 Medvedev outlined the following two tasks for the head of the Russian federal agency in charge of military equipment acquisition: purchasing high quality equipment and saving money (Medvedev, 17 June 2010), and at the budget meeting the same month he underlined that providing the army and navy with state-of-the-art military equipment remained a priority, but financial capabilities should be carefully calculated (Medvedev, 28 June 2010). Discussing state defense order in August 2009, Vladimir Putin listed six priority areas. Number one was full-scale development of strategic nuclear forces. Number two was development of space and missile defense. He also named priority types of military equipment and weapons, such as "Iskander-M" missile complex (Putin, 7 August 2009). The importance of strategic nuclear forces was reiterated during the meeting in Severodvinsk, where the state weapon program for 2011-2020 was discussed (Putin, 13 December 2010). All in all, Vladimir Putin seems to have delivered more messages on military modernization and refurbishment and his visits to military sites and enterprises seem to be more frequent than those of President Medvedev. Over the course of the previous two and a half year he often met with heads of key military enterprises ("Sukhoy", "Tupolev", "Admiralteyskie verfi", "Sevmash" etc). On a side note, nuclear discourse also seems to be reinforcing Vladimir Putin's image as a strong leader, while Dmitry Medvedev is portrayed as an innovator with his stake on modernization and his computer metaphors.

Summing up

There are a few keynote ideas in the Russian official discourse dealing with nuclear disarmament and the Russian-U.S. strategic dialogue: the need to improve bilateral relations and overcome the Cold War legacy, importance of the latest disarmament steps, U.S. missile defense plans, nuclear deterrence as the basis of strategic stability and nuclear forces as an attribute of Russian international status. All those keynote ideas are evident in statements targeting both national and international audiences; however there are crucial minor details. Cold War references are more frequent in "international" messages, which may be explained by desire to avoid unnerving domestic audience with this negative image. As for nuclear deterrence, it is not reserved for history textbooks and is still presented as a prerequisite of stability. Modernization of the nuclear forces is an integral

part of the overall modernization announced by President Medvedev, but the shadow of financial crisis is still looming, so public officials feel the need to assure citizens that financial difficulties will not affect the military.

In international statements, the emphasis is placed on multilateralism and involvement of other nuclear states, while in the national one Russia's status as a nuclear power and an equal partner of the USA is emphasized. At the same time, the legally binding nature of the new START, as well as equality of parties and balance of obligations in this treaty are underlined so often, that one feels as if this equality were not perceived as an integral part of such international agreements and as if the counterpart were not seen as completely trustworthy. There is general optimism about Obama's leadership and his nuclear agenda, but no euphoria, so criticisms are voiced, as problems remain. Ballistic missile defense is an issue in all sorts of statements. However, other problems should not be overshadowed by it, as they obviously remain the issues of concern for Russia. Development of new types of strategic weapons and potential transfer of the arms race into conventional field, as well as militarization of space are all seen as potentially destabilizing factors in the strategic domain.

Conclusion

This paper provides only a brief overview, while Russian nuclear discourse is worth a more thorough study. Statements quoted above deserve deeper analysis, and in addition to messages formulated by public officials, opinions of politicians and experts should also be carefully examined. Besides, there is a wide range of formats chosen to deliver a message and shape public opinion: comments, public statements, press conferences, articles, and even blog entries. It would be interesting to see how different formats help frame the issues for different audiences. For instance, press conferences and interviews may serve to inform the general public, articles in specialized publications and on analytic web-sites provide additional information for the interested audience, and official statements and speeches at international events are accessible to overseas observers. In some cases speakers remain politically correct, while in certain contexts they may resort to stronger language. International discourse may also have significant impact on the national one. In this respect it is important to track new U.S. concepts and initiatives and identify what response and what kind of discussion they generate within Russia. This would allow making conclusion about whether reactions correspond well to external stimuli, as well as discovering to what extent some of the problematic

issues (such as missile defense) are indeed sore spots for Russia and to what extent constant return to them is a symptom of inertia in strategic thinking.

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